

East and West – Different mindsets, different education

A) How we see the world differently		
Westerners & Western thinking	Easterners & Eastern thinking	How to apply the differences in education
<p>Analytical mind (separating objects)</p> <p>Westerners see the world in categories. Ex.: Monkey & Panda belong together as they both are animals.</p> <p>Individual objects matter. Their shape is used to categorize them.</p> <p>Everything has certain properties. The properties of objects control their behavior.</p> <p>Ex.: Space is empty, it's a vacuum.</p>	<p>Holistic mind (everything is part of a bigger frame)</p> <p>Easterners see the world as interconnected. Ex.: Monkey & Banana belong together as monkeys eat bananas.</p> <p>The substance or material of an object matters.</p> <p>Everything is influenced by its surroundings. The behavior of objects is a result of their surroundings.</p> <p>Ex.: Everything, even space, is influenced by things around it (chi).</p>	<p>Thanks to this course, I realized how much I fit into the western thinking presented in the EBS documentary "East and West". It seems to me to be the most natural thing to categorize and structure my thoughts and works. Just look at this piece of writing: What I automatically did when I started to work on it was to categorize and reorganize the many differences mentioned in the two videos.</p> <p>One thing that I should definitely remember when I teach is that I should try to give my students an overview and tell them, where the things we are learning at the moment belong to and how they fit into the overall topic or subject. However, this is analytical again. If I taught easterners, they might even be confused when I give them an overview, because they simply accept that the bits of information I give them are a part of the whole. Therefore a truly holistic teacher would probably not feel the need to tell the students where the puzzle pieces fit in, because he may think it is self-evident.</p> <p>The theory of omnipresent influence could help me with mediating problems in my future classroom. Western children tend to exclude outsiders, because they think something is wrong with that child. It might be helpful to explain them, that the behavior of the outsider is a result of their own actions and that he can be completely normal, if he is given a fair chance.</p>
Western thinking: The human mind is superior to nature.	Confucianism: The humans should live according to the laws of nature.	When I talk about mathematics, I often tell people who are not familiar with it, that math is an abstract model used to describe things in our everyday lives. Maybe easterners would understand better, if I told them that math is a law of nature on its own and not a human creation.
Ego-Perspective: Paintings show precisely how the artist sees the world.	Retro-Perspective: Pictures are painted from the object's viewpoint.	In my English lessons, it might be useful to take a video of the students, for example when they do a role play, and show it to them later. Like that, they could see themselves from a retro-perspective. Ego-perspective, on the other hand, can be emphasized by self-reflection activities, for example a diary.

B) How we see ourselves and the people around us differently

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<p>Egocentric projection: "Others feel what I feel."</p> <p>Westerners ask others what they want or let them choose.</p> <p>Ex: Food is served with knife and fork, so guest can cut it to the preferred size.</p>	<p>Relational projection: Easterners try to imagine what others think and feel.</p> <p>Easterners think ahead and do what they think others want.</p> <p>Ex: Food is chopped by the cook.</p>	<p>Section B deals mainly with the social component of teaching. I think that Austrian students are used to direct criticism from the teacher – much more than their Korean counterparts. Logically, Austrian teachers are also used to being criticized by students. To sustain a mutually cooperative classroom climate, teachers in Austria are used to ask students from time to time what they want to do and talk with them about their feelings and needs.</p> <p>On the contrary, Korean teachers teach what they think is best for the students. They do not discuss with students that much. Like that, the teacher has more authority but also more responsibility.</p>
<p>Children are raised to be independent, self-reliant and capable. "I am a superman."</p> <p>Children get motivated to brag, to feel special, and to think that they are smart.</p> <p>Children make judgements independently (ex: choose their breakfast).</p>	<p>Children are raised to be modest and do what is expected from them.</p> <p>Good people are modest. don't break the rules, and they are good friends one can rely on.</p> <p>Parents know what is good for their children (ex: prepare the breakfast that's good for kids).</p>	<p>I remember from my own childhood that I was in a constant competition with my twin brother. I always tried to be better than him, to impress our parents and our teachers, and I was rarely humble in the hours of victory (and neither was my brother). I enjoyed the respect of my classmates, because I was the best student with the best grades, although I never did the homework and drove some teachers crazy with my stubbornness. I assume that students who behave like this do not get very good grades in Korea and a bad reputation in school on top of that.</p> <p>When I teach, I usually support the egos of my students with frequent commendation and playful competition, e.g. a math challenge or a speech contest in English. I also cheer up students who fall behind a bit and try to give them some self-confidence, e.g. with easier examples.</p>
<p>Westerners judge themselves by their own justification of their deeds.</p> <p>The others' image of oneself is not that important.</p>	<p>Easterners judge themselves positively when doing what they are expected to do.</p> <p>The "Generalized other" is omnipresent - what other people think of me is very important.</p>	<p>I think that the concept of becoming an adult is a big difference between the east and the west. Austrian students start to become independent even at the age of 12. They constantly try to get more rights (going out, pocket money, hobbies, etc.) and their parents slowly grant them those rights. In high school, students develop thoughts about their place within society and explore almost all parts of an adult's life (part-time-jobs, sex, alcohol, etc.).</p> <p>In Korea, this process is very different and life-long. Even in university, professors educate students. Koreans fit themselves into an existing system throughout their lives; life seems much less experimental than in Austria.</p>

C) How we learn, understand, and find truth.

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<p>Westerners solve questions better, which they choose themselves.</p>	<p>Easterners solve questions better, which someone else chooses for them.</p>	<p>Obviously, this difference can be applied by giving students a choice or not. In western education it is very common to let students think about a topic they want to work on, for example for a seminar paper, without very detailed guidelines. I'd suggest to provide eastern students with more detailed instructions. A mix of both methods could also be fruitful.</p>
<p>Westerners understand by analyzing objects. Westerners want to see.</p> <p>Observation and analysis are the means to find truth. You present the findings neutrally so others can check it and correct it.</p> <p>The Observer (the I) is the center, everything else is an object.</p> <p>Seeing means believing and understanding. Seeing is highly regarded.</p>	<p>Easterners understand by becoming one with the object. Easterners want to be.</p> <p>The mind has to be clear; truth is found through meditation. "Those who speak don't know, those who know don't speak." (Laotze)</p> <p>Observer and object must become one to understand perfectly.</p> <p>Seeing is an action of the object → It's the object that shows up.</p>	<p>I must admit that the idea of becoming one with the object of study appeals to me very much. When learning English or mathematics, it can often be helpful to let go of previous knowledge and be ready to accept completely new knowledge and methods.</p> <p>Take pronunciation as an example: Many people try to use their mother tongue's sounds to speak foreign languages, which makes it difficult to understand them. Instead, the fastest way to learn speaking a language is listening and reproducing sounds and intonation, ideally combined with some knowledge about the tongue and teeth patterns of sounds that do not appear in one's mother tongue.</p> <p>In mathematics it often is necessary to accept new concepts and start from a tabula rasa again. However, I think that Laotze's wisdom about keeping one's knowledge to oneself is not conducive in our modern world. Objective information exchange is clearly a necessity for generating new knowledge. Learning and understanding something new in most cases is hard work that requires observation and analysis.</p>
<p>Debates and discourse are needed – truth is found through discussion.</p> <p>Talking and thinking go together.</p>	<p>Verbalizing mental processes interferes with performance.</p> <p>Eloquence is traditionally a characteristic of untrustworthy persons.</p>	<p>The fact that easterners work much better when silent and westerners while talking has direct implications on education. The basic requirement for a good presentation in the western world is a free and eloquent delivery. Teachers tell their students to read as little as possible and improvise. In Korea, it seems to be widely accepted in the academic world to present one's research by reading aloud a summary written in advance. Personally, I am skilled in the western way of exchanging thoughts in a less static setup, but I sometimes have problems with putting all my thoughts on paper.</p>

D) Differences in language		
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<p>More Nouns ("More tea?") => Everything is individual</p> <p>Plural and singular are used to be specific.</p>	<p>More Verbs ("Drink more?") => Everything is interconnected</p> <p>Few linguistic distinctions between singular and plural.</p>	<p>The differences in this section are significant for my second major, English, and any other language.</p> <p>Austrians who study English have little problems with memorizing nouns and using them correctly, but they often use verbs inaccurately, especially in idioms. So when I teaching English in Austria, I should put a special emphasis on the proper usage of verbs. Koreans seem to have problems with English verbs and nouns equally – it generally is more difficult for them to learn English, just because there are so many conceptual differences between those two languages, for example how they distinguish between plural and genders. It, always again, surprises me that “he” and “she” are so frequently confused by Koreans who speak English.</p>
<p>Principle of identity... One thing has one name.</p>	<p>Principle of change... One thing can have several names, e.g. a mountain can have a different name for every season of the year.</p>	<p>Concluding, it seems much easier to me to teach westerners, when it is about things that are indefinite, because they are used to try different ways to analyze things and find one common truth, often as a compromise.</p> <p>On the other hand it is less of a problem to teach objective facts to easterners, because they are less reluctant to accept things as they are, even if there remains some ambiguity in the matter.</p>

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References:

EBS Documentary: “The East and the West”, presented by Korea Educational Broadcast System, 2008; produced and directed by Lee, Jeong-Ook; written by Kim, Myung-jin.